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THIS WEEK: Alfred Piquenard, Designer of the Iowa State Capitol

BACKGROUND:

This article is based on a paper written by Wayne C. Temple, PH.D., F.R.S.A. The paper is titled "Alfred Henry Piquenard: Architect of Illinois' Sixth Capitol." Dr. Temple was employed by The Illinois State Archives as its chief deputy director at the time the paper was written.

PROLOGUE:

Alfred Piquenard is generally credited with the design of the Iowa State Capitol. Architects Mifflin Bell and William Hackney also worked on the Iowa Capitol. John Cochrane was a partner with Piquenard at the time the original plans were submitted to the Iowa Capitol competition, but he seems to have been the business partner and not necessarily involved with the design or its execution.

Alfred Piquenard

Alfred Henry Piquenard was born in a village called Commune de Bernay located in Normandy, France, on December 28, 1825. The son of a builder, painter, and decorator, Alfred stood almost six feet tall had brown hair and gray eyes.

Alfred left Bernay for Paris at a young age to enroll in a school for civil engineering. It's believed he studied in some of the best schools of design in France as well. He received an excellent education and was able to speak and write English. Subsequently, Piquenard earned his living as an engineer until he delved into architecture.

Piquenard came to the United States with the Icarians. Icarians lived as communists, sharing equally. The followers were allowed little private property. They did believe in marriage but were not allowed to raise their own children. The Icarians believed child rearing was best left to someone other than the birth parents, so the children would not be “corrupted.” Etienne Cabet was the leader of this French utopian society, and his plan was to begin an Icarian community in the United States. He purchased land in Texas, and Piquenard was among the 139 Icarians who arrived in New Orleans on March 27, 1848. After traveling to Texas, they discovered the land was not what they had anticipated. Therefore, it was abandoned, and the Icarians returned to New Orleans. During the winter of 1848-49, Piquenard left the Icarians and traveled up the Mississippi River to St. Louis and joined the American Fur Company.

A second wave of Icarians arrived in New York in December of 1848. They then traveled to New Orleans. Many of the Icarians went back to France, but those remaining learned the Mormons had abandoned Nauvoo in Hancock County, Illinois. In March of 1849, the Icarians steamed up the Mississippi River, and 261 French Icarians landed in Nauvoo. Piquenard had rejoined them in St. Louis. The Icarians eventually established many businesses. History recorded them as being “intelligent, moral, and industrious men and women.”

In 1850, the federal census showed there were over 277 French Icarians living in Nauvoo. Alfred Piquenard was listed as an architect and unmarried. In addition to his building duties, and because he possessed a mastery of both French and English languages, Piquenard edited a newspaper in Nauvoo called *The Popular Tribune*. He seems to have grown disenchanted with the Icarians because in 1852 he left for Dubuque where he worked under federal contract to complete land surveys. On August 7, 1852, while he was in Dubuque, he made application for naturalization.

In 1852, Piquenard traveled back to France. He spoke out against Louis Napoleon and quickly was thrown into jail. His father put up necessary bail for Piquenard’s release, and Alfred fled from France back to the United States in 1853, making his home in St. Louis. He did not rejoin the Icarians in Nauvoo.

While in St. Louis, Piquenard worked with architect Thomas Waring Walsh. During this time Piquenard received his naturalization on May 7, 1857. He also formed a liaison with his future wife Marie Dennzieres Winkelman.

Alfred and Marie Piquenard claimed themselves as husband and wife when the census of 1860 was taken in St. Louis. This seemed the right thing to do because their two year old son was counted in the household as well. Alfred E. was born in 1858. Marie’s legal husband had abandoned her years before, but she did not want to divorce him because of her religious upbringing, and she couldn’t claim desertion until 1864.

Answering President Abraham Lincoln’s call for volunteers, Piquenard joined Company K of the Second Regiment, U.S. Reserve Corp Missouri Infantry as a private for a three-month enlistment. He won promotion to Lieutenant in Company K, and after his three months had expired, he re-enlisted for three years and became Captain of Company G of the Third Regiment known as “Piquenard’s Company of Pioneers.” These special troops were actually construction

engineers who benefited from Piquenard's background. While serving in the Civil War, Piquenard contracted malaria. He had to return home to St. Louis, where he stayed for several weeks while being treated with quinine.

Piquenard's Company was discharged in February of 1863. The reason given for the discharge was that their "service was no longer being required."

When Piquenard left the Union army, he and his family lived for about a year in Leavenworth, Kansas. In 1864, Marie and Alfred had a daughter named Estelle. While in Kansas, they quietly traveled to St. Joseph, Missouri, and were finally married on September 12, 1864.

The Piquenard's returned to St. Louis in 1865. Alfred joined George Ingham Barnett's architectural firm. In 1866 the Piquenard's had a second daughter named Marie Rosalie, whom they called Rosa.

By 1867, Piquenard's health began to decline. He was treated for an enlarged liver. His condition, acquired during the Civil War, was becoming worse with time. He actually stooped when he walked to reduce the pain. Another blow to the family was the death of little Estelle. She died in the fall of 1867.

In February of 1867, the Illinois General Assembly determined that the state needed a new capitol building. A competition for plans was announced. John C. Cochran, working with George Garnsey, submitted plans to the commission. This plan was subsequently approved, and the \$3,000 prize was awarded to Cochran. It was discovered that Cochran had bribed the Illinois Commissioners by spending \$2,700 of his own money to win approval for the design that he and Garnsey had submitted. He did not share the prize with Garnsey. Garnsey would later testify against Cochran during an investigation of the bribery scandal.

Cochran had been in St. Louis between 1859 and 1861, the same period Piquenard was there; therefore, Piquenard would have known that Cochran was part of the architectural community. So, when Piquenard moved to Chicago in 1867, Cochran offered him a partnership. Piquenard accepted, stepping into Garney's vacated position and revised the plans for the Illinois Capitol.

Cochran and Piquenard enjoyed a profitable partnership. Cochran obtained the contracts, and Piquenard designed the structures.

When the Iowa Commissioners advertised for a competition to submit plans to build a new Iowa Capitol, Cochran reused his plans for the Illinois Capitol for this Iowa competition. The Iowa Commissioners chose Cochran and Piquenard's plan labeled "Palladian." The duo was awarded the contract for building Iowa's new capitol in 1870.

In 1870, Piquenard moved his family to Springfield, Illinois. His family now consisted of his wife, Marie (Mary), son, Alfred E., and daughters, Marie Rosalie, and Juliette Pauline. Shortly after arriving in Springfield, Marie Rosalie died as the result of a fall. She was just over four years old at the time. She is buried in the Oak Ridge Cemetery. The question still remains

whether Rosa's fatal fall resulted from her following her father around the construction site of the Illinois Capitol.

Cochran went on to form an enterprise in Chicago. He continued his partnership in the Illinois Capitol but gave up his interest in the Iowa Capitol in 1872.

Upon acquiring both the Illinois and Iowa capitol building projects, Piquenard left for Europe to study domes and examine the newest building methods. Because Louis Napoleon was now in exile, it was safe for him to return to France.

Piquenard worked on completing the Illinois Capitol while also working on the early construction stages of the Iowa Capitol, but, unfortunately, he did not live to see either building completely finished. Piquenard became seriously ill and passed away November 19, 1876. An autopsy revealed that he had died of an enlarged liver and spleen as a result of the malaria he had contracted during the Civil War. He is buried in Oak Ridge Cemetery, next to his daughter.

Architects Mifflin Bell and William Hackney completed the Iowa State Capitol.

As you walk down the Grand Staircase of the Iowa Capitol, stop for a moment and look at the cast bronze statues on the newel post at the base of the stairs. Piquenard designed these statues for the Illinois Capitol. When the Iowa Capitol Commissioners visited the Illinois Capitol during construction, the statues were presented by the Illinois Commissioners to the Iowa Commissioners and subsequently used in the Iowa Capitol.